



Central Naugatuck Valley

HELP, Inc.

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Testimony Submitted to the Appropriation Committee

Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan

Submitted By: Roberta Murtagh, Executive Director, C.N.V. Help, Inc.

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To Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan.

I am the executive director of Central Naugatuck Valley Help, Inc., a private, nonprofit agency providing substance abuse treatment and mental health services to men and women in Waterbury, Torrington, and Danbury.

We provide three group homes for individuals with psychiatric disorders, which are located in Waterbury and Torrington. These group homes were converted from full grant funding from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to reimbursement under the Medicaid Rehab Option several years ago.

As you know, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services recently had a cut to the line item of mental health grants, which at our agency, resulted in the loss of staff and a reduction to services. Now, barely two months later, we're looking at further cuts to grants for mental health services and a proposed 5% cut to Medicaid rates. This will be a devastating cut to our group homes, which serve some of the most psychiatrically disabled people in our community. Group homes are the highest level of care other than inpatient hospitalization. Maintaining adequate staffing in these programs is essential to their success and the safety and well being of the clients we serve. It would be irresponsible not to staff these programs adequately. Yet, with costs rising for health care, utilities, food, insurance, gasoline, maintenance and every other expense, personnel is the only area that a nonprofit, such as ours, can cut when our revenue is reduced.

We have already made reductions to our employees' benefits and reduced our operating costs as much as possible. The state cannot continue to squeeze the private nonprofit community without seeing real and dire consequences. The alternative to our being able to provide these services is that the services will need to be provided by state facilities at a far greater cost.

In addition, I urge this committee to not accept the Governor's proposal that the state save money by expanding the preferred drug list to include all mental health drugs. Interruptions to medication regimes are harmful to individuals and likely to result in more costly interventions. Also, the cuts to Independent Living Centers, along with the elimination of Vision Services, non-emergency Medical Transportation, and Over-the-Counter Drugs and increases to Co-Pays are not in the best interest of human beings or big-picture budget considerations. Please find more humane and more fiscally sound ways to deal with the state's deficit.

Thank you.